

A Metaphor for AVP

Our emotions are at the core of our being. They are a major contributing factor in developing our value system and directly impact our perceptions. They are how we experience the world and they are what motivate and drive us. We tend to repeat behaviors that result in pleasurable emotions and avoid behaviors that result in danger or unpleasant emotions. Life is all about emotions; whether we ignore them, run from them, suppress them, embrace them, understand them, are controlled by them, overwhelmed by them or simply experience them. They are real, they are the medium by which we experience the world. They connect the experience of our inner world with the experience of the outer world. Our body's reactions to external and internal stimuli communicates important information to us, and we need to listen to it.

If we think of our life as a journey, then our body is our vehicle and our emotions are how our body communicates with us. The emotional content of our thoughts and perceptions are communicated to us through our bodily sensations. Every aspect of our body is impacted by our emotions. This explains why stress is either the cause or a contributing factor in all illnesses; and why laughter and positive thoughts have been linked to the healing process and health. The significance of our emotions is illustrated in this quote by Maya Angelou, "'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'"

A metaphor for the vehicle on our journey could be a car. So, if our body is a car, then everything outside our car are the things, events, places and people in our life. Other people are their own cars and other cultures would have different signage. Our emotions are the feedback system of the car; i.e., the dashboard. The dashboard helps us understand the condition of our car; it gives us warning signs, tells us the condition of our braking system, steering, lights, heating and cooling, tire pressure and how much gas we have. We need to know these things in order to maintain our car for a long and healthy life [journey]. When our car is in good condition, we have high energy to negotiate life, have more fun and go where we want to go enjoying the scenery along the way. Seeing our dashboard clearly is like knowing ourselves well. If we don't see the dashboard or the dashboard isn't operating properly, we are more likely to face energy draining problems and situations.

Now, relating this metaphor to real life situations. When people experience trauma, especially in childhood, they experience life as being unsafe. Their normal and natural reaction, if this trauma is not healed, is to protect themselves. They do this by closing off emotionally to others, which also results in them disconnecting from their own emotions. Relating this experience to the metaphor of the car; the dashboard lights have now gone out and they are driving through a dense fog with limited vision and virtually no internal feedback. They are isolated and can only respond to what is immediately in front of them. They tend to be defined by others' expectations and behaviors with no vision of who they are or where they want to go in life, often stagnating. They respond to what is presented to them and lose hope in reaching a favorable destination. They see no way to change their situation; no way out.

They lose the ability to pick up on social cues and they lack empathy. They don't see cars turning in front of them or heading on a collision course with them. And, if they do

see conflict coming, they don't avoid it because they have become accustomed to the adrenaline rush as their experience of excitement and pleasure. There is no true joy or intimate connection in their life. They may get a job and it's a different culture speaking a different language they don't understand, i.e., all the road signs are incomprehensible. They lose their job and blame their supervisor because they can't take responsibility for what they don't understand.

Although AVP does not directly deal with unhealed trauma or the resulting shame, it does impact their effects. AVP creates safety within which participants let down their barriers and see themselves more clearly. As they understand themselves better and reconnect with their emotions, they open up to connect with others. Thus, their dashboard lights begin to brighten and the fog begins to lift. Normally, the better people know themselves, the more they like themselves and this changes their whole outlook on life. Their inner and outer worlds get bigger and safer, and they begin to look for the good in themselves and in others, which greatly increases the likelihood they will find it. They are no longer just surviving, they are now beginning to thrive; they develop hope and a sense of purpose in life. As this positive approach is reinforced, it becomes stronger and they learn to trust more and more. They can see further down the road and life becomes a much more pleasant journey. They still have conflict, but now they can see well enough and have the tools to effectively deal with them without being controlled or damaged by them.

The AVP experience changes everything, as evidenced by what participants have said.

- "If there is such a thing as a miraculous change in an individual, I can truthfully say that it was during my involvement with AVP that I began to grow from a person filled with hate, anger, and despair, into a person who believes he too is responsible for the protection, preservation and enrichment of humanity."
- "There is good in every one. We have not known how to see that good without being perceived as weak and vulnerable. AVP showed me how to reach down and see it, to tap that guy that has always wanted to come out but was afraid to come out."
- "I came out of AVP as a changed person. I was alive. I was actually alive. I liked what I saw in myself. I liked what I saw in the mirror."